

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

- 1    1. (Currently Amended) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:
  - 2                 creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was created;
  - 5                 maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;
  - 7                 loading blocks of the writable vdisk into a memory, the loaded writable vdisk blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality of fields, each writable vdisk indirect block field storing a valid pointer to a writable vdisk data block or an invalid pointer representing one of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing store;
  - 13                loading blocks of the backing store into the memory, the loaded backing store blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a ~~field of the~~ writable vdisk indirect block field, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer to a backing store data block;
  - 18                searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and
  - 19                filling each hole in the writable vdisk by replacing each invalid pointer with a pointer to the backing store data block referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

- 1    2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - 2                 dirtying the backing store data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable write allocation of the dirty backing store data block without altering a data content of the backing store data block.

1    3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4, further comprising:  
2         choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered  
3         data content;  
4         setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5         placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the  
6         writable vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1    4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 3 further comprising:  
2         freeing the dirty backing store data block; and  
3         writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1    5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 4 further comprising:  
2         releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby  
3         separate the writable vdisk ~~data-blocks~~ from the backing store ~~data-blocks~~.

1    6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the pointers contained in the writable vdisk  
2         indirect block fields and the backing store indirect block fields comprise logical volume  
3         block numbers (VBNs).

1    7. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the invalid pointers contained in  
2         the writable vdisk indirect block fields comprises a zero logical volume block number  
3         (VBN).

1    8. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the plurality of fields in the writable vdisk  
2         indirect block are a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of fields in the backing  
3         store indirect block are a backing store level 1 buffer.

1    9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for operating a computer database, comprising:

2           a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3 referencing changes in data stored in a data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4 created;

5           a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage  
6 system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

7           a backdoor message handler that loads blocks of the writable vdisk and backing  
8 store from disk into a memory of the storage system;

9           a writable vdisk indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
10 | writable vdisk field storing a valid pointer to a writable vdisk data block or an invalid  
11 | pointer representing one of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the data storage  
12 | system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing store;

13           a backing store indirect block in the memory having a plurality of fields, each  
14 | backing store indirect block field corresponding to a ~~field of the~~ writable vdisk indirect  
15 | block field, each backing store indirect block field having a pointer to a backing store  
16 | data block;

17           a special loading function that searches each field of the writable vdisk indirect  
18 block for one or more fields representing a hole; and

19           a write allocator that fills each hole in the ~~writable~~ writable vdisk by replacing  
20 | each invalid pointer with a pointer to the backing store data block referenced by the  
21 | corresponding backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference  
22 | both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which  
23 | has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1       10. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the write allocator further  
2 | ~~comprises:~~ chooses a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing unaltered  
3 | data content, set bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block, and  
4 | place the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the field of the writable vdisk  
5 | indirect block to replace the hole.

1    11. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the write allocator further  
2    frees the dirty backing store data block and writes the newly allocated data block to disk.

1    12. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the backdoor message  
2    handler further loads the blocks of the writable vdisk and the blocks of the backing store  
3    during periods of reduced processing activity.

1    13. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the pointers contained in the  
2    writable vdisk indirect block fields and the pointers in backing store indirect block fields  
3    comprise logical volume block numbers (VBNs).

1    14. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the invalid pointers  
2    contained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields comprise a zero logical volume block  
3    number (VBN).

1    15. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the plurality of fields in the  
2    writable vdisk indirect block comprises a writable vdisk level 1 buffer and the plurality of  
3    fields in the backing store indirect block comprises a backing store level 1 buffer.

1    16.-18. (Cancelled).

1    19. (Currently Amended) A data storage system apparatus, comprising:  
2         means for creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable  
3         vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable  
4         vdisk was created;

5         means for maintaining a backing store, the backing store referencing data stored  
6         in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was  
7         created;

8         means for loading blocks of the writable vdisk from a disk into a memory, the  
9         loaded writable vdisk blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block having a plurality

10 | of fields, each writable vdisk field storing a valid pointer to a writable vdisk data block or  
11 | an invalid pointer representing one of a plurality of holes, where each hole instructs the  
12 | data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the  
13 | backing store;

14 | means for loading blocks of the backing store from a disk into the memory, the  
15 | loaded backing store blocks including a backing store indirect block having a plurality of  
16 | fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a ~~field of the writable~~  
17 | vdisk indirect block field, one or more backing store indirect block fields having a pointer  
18 | to a backing store data block;

19 | means for searching each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for a hole; and  
20 | means for filling each hole in the writable vdisk by replacing each invalid pointer  
21 | with a pointer to the backing store data block referenced by the corresponding backing  
22 | store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is  
23 | unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed  
24 | since the writable vdisk was created .

1 | 20. (Currently Amended) A non-transitory computer readable medium executable  
2 | program instructions executed by a processor, comprising:

3 | program instructions that create a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time,  
4 | the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in a data storage system after the  
5 | writable vdisk was created;

6 | program instructions that maintain a backing store, the backing store referencing  
7 | data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the writable  
8 | vdisk was created;

9 | program instructions that load blocks of the writable vdisk from a disk into a  
10 | memory, the loaded writable vdisk blocks including a writable vdisk indirect block  
11 | having a plurality of fields, each writable vdisk field storing a valid pointer to a writable  
12 | vdisk data block or an invalid pointer representing one of a plurality of holes, where each  
13 | hole instructs the data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number  
14 | pointer in the backing store;

15        program instructions that load blocks of the backing store from a disk into the  
16    memory, the loaded backing store blocks including a backing store indirect block having  
17    a plurality of fields, each backing store indirect block field corresponding to a ~~field of the~~  
18    writable vdisk indirect block field, one or more backing store indirect block fields having  
19    a pointer to a backing store data block;

20        program instructions that search each field of the writable vdisk indirect block for  
21    a hole; and

22        program instructions that fill each hole in the ~~writable-writable~~ vdisk by  
23    replacing each invalid pointer with a pointer to the backing store data block referenced by  
24    the corresponding backing store indirect block field to update the writable vdisk to  
25    reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the  
26    data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1    21.-22. (Cancelled).

1    23. (Currently Amended) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:

2        creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3    referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4    created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the  
5    storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing  
6    store;

7        maintaining the backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
8    data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

9        searching each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and

10        filling each hole in the writable vdisk by replacing each hole in the writable vdisk  
11    to point to ~~the-a~~ data block referenced by ~~the-a~~ corresponding backing store indirect block  
12    of the backing store to fill each hole of the ~~writable-writable~~ vdisk with the data block  
13    referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block and thus update the writable  
14    vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created  
15    and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1    24. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2                 dirtying the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block to enable  
3                 write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of the data block.

1    25. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 23-24 further comprising:  
2                 choosing a new pointer for a newly allocated data block containing an unaltered  
3                 data content;  
4                 setting bits in block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block; and  
5    |                 placing the new pointer to the newly allocated data block into the-a field of the-a  
6                 writable vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1    26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 25, further comprising:  
2                 freeing the dirty data block; and  
3                 writing the newly allocated data block to disk.

1    27. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 26 further comprising:  
2                 releasing an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store to thereby  
3    |                 separate the-writable vdisk data-blocks from the-backing store data-blocks.

1    28. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 23, further comprising:  
2    |                 including logical volume block numbers (VBNs) in the-pointers contained in the-a  
3                 writable vdisk indirect block fields of the writable vdisk and the-a backing store indirect  
4                 block fields of the backing store.

1    29. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 23-28, further comprising:  
2                 using a zero logical volume block number (VBN) as the-an invalid pointers  
3                 contained in the hole of the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1    30. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 23, further comprising:

2       using a writable vdisk level 1 buffer for the\_a plurality of fields in the\_a writable  
3       vdisk indirect block of the writable vdisk and using a backing store level 1 buffer for the  
4       a plurality of fields in the backing store indirect block.

1     31. (Currently Amended) A data storage system, comprising:

2           a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3       referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4       created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes , each hole instructing the storage  
5       system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing store;

6           the backing store referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not  
7       been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

8           a processor that searches each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and

9           the processor that fills each hole in the writable vdisk so that each hole in the  
10      writable vdisk points to the\_a data block referenced by the\_a corresponding backing store  
11      indirect block to fill each hole of the writable\_writable vdisk with the data block  
12      referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block and thus update the writable  
13      vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created  
14      and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1     32. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 31, further comprising:wherein the  
2       processor further dirties the data block pointed to by the backing store indirect block are  
3       dirtied to enable write allocation of the dirty data block without altering a data content of  
4       the data block.

1     33. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 31, further comprising:wherein the  
2       processor further:

3           chooses a new pointer chosen for a newly allocated data block containing an  
4       unaltered data content;

5           sets bits are set in a-block allocation structures for the newly allocated data block;  
6       and

7        places a new pointer to the newly allocated data block placed into a field of the  
8        writable vdisk indirect block to replace the hole.

1        34. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 33, further comprising:wherein the  
2        processor further:

3            frees the dirty data block is freed; and  
4            writes the newly allocated data block is written to disk.

1        35. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 34 further comprising:wherein the  
2        processor further releases an association of the writable vdisk to the backing store is  
3        released to thereby separate the writable vdisk data blocks from the backing store data  
4        blocks.

1        36. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 31, further comprising:wherein the  
2        processor further has logical volume block numbers (VBNs) included in the pointers  
3        contained in the-a writable vdisk indirect block fields of the writable vdisk and the-a  
4        backing store indirect block fields of the backing store.

1        37. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 3436, further comprising:wherein the  
2        processor further uses a zero logical volume block number (VBN) used as the-an invalid  
3        pointers in the hole contained in the writable vdisk indirect block fields.

1        38. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 31, further comprising:wherein the  
2        processor further uses a writable vdisk level 1 buffer used for the-a plurality of fields in  
3        the-a writable vdisk indirect block of the writable vdisk and use a backing store level 1  
4        buffer used for the-a plurality of fields in the backing store indirect block.

1        39. (Currently Amended) A non-transitory computer readable medium containing  
2        executable program instructions executed by a processor comprising:

3        program instructions that create a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time,  
4        the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the  
5        writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole  
6        instructs the storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a  
7        backing store;

8        program instructions that maintain the backing store, the backing store  
9        referencing data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since the  
10      writable vdisk was created;

11        program instructions that search each field of the writable vdisk for a hole; and  
12        program instructions that fill each hole in the writable vdisk to point to ~~the\_a~~ data  
13        block referenced by ~~the\_a~~ corresponding backing store indirect block to fill each hole of  
14        the ~~writable\_writable~~ vdisk with the data block referenced by the corresponding backing  
15        store indirect block and thus update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is  
16        unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed  
17        since the writable vdisk was created.

1        40. (Currently Amended) A method for operating a data storage system, comprising:

2            creating a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3            referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4            created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the data  
5            storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in a backing  
6            store;

7            maintaining the backing store, the backing store referencing the data stored in the  
8            data storage system which has not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

9            searching, by a background task process, each field of the writable vdisk for a  
10          hole;

11          for each hole in the ~~writable\_writable~~ vdisk, marking as dirty ~~the\_a~~ corresponding  
12          data block pointed to by ~~the\_a~~ backing store indirect block without modifying the  
13          corresponding data block; and

14        performing a write allocation to replace each hole in the writable vdisk to point to  
15    the data block marked as dirty and referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect  
16    block to update the writable vdisk to reference both the data which is unchanged since the  
17    writable vdisk was created and the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk  
18    was created.

1        41. (Currently Amended) A data storage system, comprising:

2            a writable virtual disk (vdisk) created at a selected time, the writable vdisk  
3    referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the writable vdisk was  
4    created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole instructs the data  
5    storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer in the backing  
6    store;

7            the backing store referencing the data stored in the data storage system which has  
8    not been changed since the writable vdisk was created;

9            a background task processor that searches each field of the writable vdisk for a  
10   hole; and

11            the background task processor that marks as dirty, for each hole in the ~~writable~~  
12    ~~writable~~ vdisk, ~~the-a~~ corresponding data block pointed to by ~~the-a~~ backing store indirect  
13    block without modifying the corresponding data block, and performs a write allocation to  
14    replace each hole in the writable vdisk to point to the data block marked as dirty and  
15    referenced by the corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk  
16    to reference both the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and  
17    the data which has been changed since the writable vdisk was created.

1        42. (Currently Amended) A non-transitory computer readable medium containing  
2    executable program instructions executed by a processor, comprising:

3            program instructions that create a writable virtual disk (vdisk) at a selected time,  
4    the writable vdisk referencing changes in data stored in the data storage system after the  
5    writable vdisk was created, the writable vdisk having a plurality of holes where each hole

6     instructs the data storage system to examine a corresponding virtual block number pointer  
7     in a backing store;  
8                 program instructions that maintain the backing store, the backing store  
9     referencing the data stored in the data storage system which has not been changed since  
10    the writable vdisk was created;  
11                 program instructions that search, by a background task process, each field of the  
12    writable vdisk for a hole;  
13                 program instructions that mark as dirty, for each hole in the ~~writable-writable~~  
14    vdisk, ~~the-a~~ corresponding data block pointed to by ~~the-a~~ backing store indirect block  
15    without modifying the corresponding data block; and  
16                 program instructions that perform a write allocation to replace each hole in the  
17    writable vdisk to point to the data block marked as dirty and referenced by the  
18    corresponding backing store indirect block to update the writable vdisk to reference both  
19    the data which is unchanged since the writable vdisk was created and the data which has  
20    been changed since the writable vdisk was created.